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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the logic and the structure of economic motivations for adult literacy promotion. It uses as an example the People's Republic of China to demonstrate how economic motivations can best serve the cause of adult literacy and suggests applying these concepts to India. The paper is organized in three parts. In the first part, the general nature of human motivations and the process of building and sustaining motivations is discussed. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the logic and structure of using economic motivations in adult literacy for development. In the second part, the national effort to use economic motivations in literacy and development in China is described, and the effectiveness of this ongoing effort is evaluated. In the third part, the possibilities of applying economic motivations for literacy promotion in India are suggested. (KC)

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ADULT LITERACY FOR DEVELOPMENT:

THE LOGIC AND STRUCTURE OF ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS

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ADULT LITERACY FOR DEVELOPMENT:

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PREFATORY REMARKS

We are today engaged in two celebrations -- the International Literacy Year, and the birthday of one of India's eminent sons who has continued to make important contributions to our lives as a literacy educator, economist and public servant. I have, therefore, decided to talk today about literacy and economics together, more specifically on the topic of the logic and the structure of economic motivations for adult literacy promotion. I have taken the case of the People's Republic of China to demonstrate how economic motivations can best serve the cause of adult literacy; and then speculate about the possibilities of using economic motivations for adult literacy promotion in India.

The paper is in three parts. In the first part, the general nature of human motivations and the process of building and sustaining motivations is discussed; and the logic and structure of using economic motivations in adult literacy for development are analyzed. In part two, the national effort to use economic motivations in literacy and development in China is described and the effectiveness of this on-going effort is evaluated. In part three, the possibilities of applying economic motivations for literacy promotion in India are discussed.

MOTIVATIONS AND THE MOTIVATIONAL PROCESS

To be motivated (1) is to have a personal motive to think, plan and act in a particular way to achieve a particular objective -- moral or material.

Learning motivations is a social process. Except for the "motivations" rooted in the "drives" to satisfy physical "needs" such as hunger, thirst, play, sexuality, and bodily rest, human motivations are acquired through social processes of acculturation, socialization and education. It follows that human motivations are not spontaneous -- except, of course, for those motivations that are connected with organic needs -- that is, felt needs experienced as physical deprivations. It also follows that all human beings, in the very process of identity formation, learn and internalize a complex set of individual motivations.

Development and motivation connection. In doing development work, therefore, development agents have to discover

the already internalized motivations -- popularly called the "felt needs" -- of people and to use the existing motivations to teach new knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. They have to transform and extent those existing motivations so as to connect them more directly with the new needs to learn innovative educational messages and development actions. Finally, some brand new needs have to be fashioned and brand new motivations have to be taught so that people may engage in personal praxis, social transformation and cultural renewal.

Teaching new motivations. In teaching new motivations, as in all education, we must also start where the people are. The process is implied in the preceding paragraph. That is, we must start with the "felt needs" of people and work towards a set of "fashioned needs" that are authentic and not artificial needs. That means that development workers should start a dialectical process within communities between the present and a preferred future to invent new possibilities for communities. The calculus of means and ends necessary for achieving new possibilities has then to be clarified. The existing net of present motivations among individuals has to be articulated and then has to go through a process of reorientation, transformation and addition. For example, we may have to discover together that for a life, enriched both materially and culturally, the community may have to have a network of motivations that includes not only motivations for higher productivity and economic rewards, but also motivations for acquiring good health habits, for learning science and technology, environmental protection and family planning.

Ethics of action and inaction. Agents of social change can not deal only with felt needs and stay away from fashioning new needs because they do not want to "impose their values on others." The one-directional imposition of values on others is, of course, not a good value. On the other hand, to withhold from others a set of values which we believe are contributory to our common human survival, universal good and to a more humane future is not a worthy value, either. Development after all is a value enterprise. Teaching new needs and engendering new and alternative motivations is what the development process and cultural renewal are all about. Development agents can not withdraw from their missions because people are not already motivated. They can not postpone or shake down their plans because the people are not ready. To do so would be to misunderstand the true nature of the development process, and to misconstrue development work as mere transportation and retailing of goods and services. To wait for people to become self-motivated would be benign neglect, worse still it would be to blame the victim and throw him or her on the garbage heap of history.

Structural reinforcement of motivations. Motivations should not only be taught, they must be reinforced through commensurate changes in economic, social, and political institutions and structures. There is more to teaching motivations than writing songs, inventing slogans and carrying

banners to generate public hysteria. What is shouted in slogans and displayed on unfurled banners must be reinforced through new rules of the game in economic, social and political life. If motivations taught are not reinforced through appropriate economic, social and political rewards (and are infact first taught and then cynically thwarted), these motivations will be extinguished. In subsequent cycles of planning for social change, teaching of new motivations will be far more difficult than before.

THE NATURE OF ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS

Using economic motivations for adult literacy means, of course, to offer economic rewards, immediate and not so immediate, to non-literate men and women to become literate.

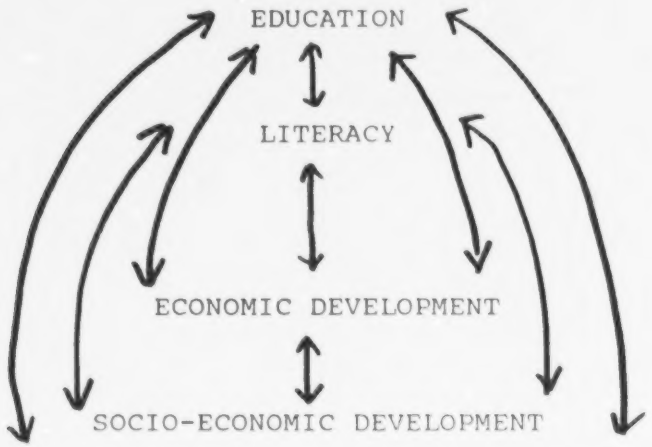
Cash for participation in literacy work. Sometimes, economic motivations for adult literacy have been handled through economic rewards that are direct and immediate. For example, Iraq, and some other Gulf States as well, have offered cash to participants in literacy programs for the number of literacy classes attended and have imposed fines for absences from literacy classes. This has been possible in countries where, on the one hand, there was a lot of public money available for buying time of adult men and women by paying at least part of the opportunity costs for attending literacy classes, and where, on the other hand, the prevailimg political culture allowed the governors to use such "carrot and stick" approaches in controlling citizen participation.

Economic development as motivation for literacy. In this paper, when we talk of economic motivations for adult literacy, we are really talking of "economic development" as a motivation for adult literacy. We are talking of economic rewards through economic development that non-literate adults should expect if they become literate. Our focus is on the individual non-literate and we make the related assumption that the surrounding structures will be both just and generative so that individual economic development will translate also into societal economic development. There is also the assumption that economic motivations, after the most acutely felt deprivations have been met, will be generalized into other sets of cultural motivations and thereby material development will be expanded to include moral development.

A DIALECTICAL MODEL OF LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT

We like to think that the old and useless discussion of what comes first, literacy or development, has by now been burried for good (2). We have come to understand, we hope, that the historical categories used to explain developments in England during the industrial revolution do not make sense in the policy and planning cultures of the 1990s. Today, we are not studying history but are making history through deliberate social interventions. We must, therefore, assume a dialectical relationship between literacy and development to understand the

role of literacy and education in development. The model presented graphically below outlines the interrelationships:



With the above model in mind, we can now frame two major questions thus:

1. Why should we focus on the dialectic between literacy and economic development and not on some other possible dialectic between some other social processes that may be more effectively generative of development?

2. Once the dialectic between literacy and economic development has been adopted as focus, where and how should we intervene in this dialectic so that this dialectical relationship becomes mutually enriching and, subsequently, becomes generative of more encompassing values and morally more defensible missions?

The place of literacy in this particular dialectic. The choice of literacy in the dialectic is easily justified. To be human is to have a culture. Human cultures have been possible, only because human beings are able to make "symbolic transformations" of reality to make cultures. In moving from orality to literacy, we are extending our capacities to make those symbolic transformations. Thus, to become literate is, to borrow from Paulo Freire, a truly "human vocation." At a concrete level, literacy is "potential added" to the new literate to enable the new literate to make more effective transactions with all aspects of human environment -- economic, social, political and cultural. That means that literacy empowers in all ways, and thereby is the great equalizer between and among men and women. Illiteracy, on the other hand, shuts the door on all codified knowledge and thereby on most science and technology; inhibits creation and consumption of culture;

and hinders sensible "choice" which is the very essence of all democracy.

The choice of economic development in the dialectic. The choice of "economic" development in this dielectical relationship is pragmatic. We have implied in our discussion of human motivations that in societies where material deprivations are the most acutely felt, economic motivations will have a much greater chance of being effective. Men do not live by bread alone, but without bread they can not live at all.

The choice of the dialectic itself. From the above it should be clear why the particular dialectic between literacy and economic development had been chosen. Economic deprivations are the most acutely felt deprivations in the Third World today. Economic development is a cultural process of symbolic transformations resulting in both material and symbolic capital. Literacy is an essential instrument of doing symbolic transformations and creating material and symbolic capital. There is a semiotic and thus a symbiotic connection between literacy and economic development that should make them congenial partners in this dialectic. This is a fertile dialectic in another way. On the one hand, literacy can be seen to expand to include education -- formal education, nonformal education and informal education. On the other hand, the conception of economic development can be expanded to include a vision of development that is both material and moral.

The point of intervention in the dialectic. Where do we intervene in this dialectic? In dialectical relationships there is, of course, no one best entry point and indeed no first and no second. Existential realities will determine where and when interventions should be made. As long as literacy remains part of the dialectic, it could come in whenever it is demanded by the logic of the project on literacy for economic development. Once the dialectical relationship has been articulated, and dynamized, it will become self-sustaining in the lives of both individuals and programs.

THE CASE OF CHINA

The People's Republic of China (3) has used economic motivations for adult literacy and adult education with considerable success. The ideological and theoretical expectations suggested in the theoretical discussion above are fulfilled in the Chinese case. The political and economic conditions are congenial as well. The educational strategy is right. The required structural changes are effectively implemented and the institutional interfaces are successfully managed.

The context and the conditions. The socialist revolution in China under Mao Zedong had played an important historical role in the life of China. While totalitarianism had extracted unnecessary human costs from the Chinese people, the revolution did succeed in incorporating all the people within the process

of social transformation, destroyed feudalism, and made egalitarianism a moral mission for the polity. The state ownership of all property and control of all processes of production, however, had extinguished all individual initiative and engendered other-reliance and dependency on bureaucratic structures. Productivity was low and there was little "wealth" produced for socialist distribution among the people.

Later years of the Mao era, that is, the years of the cultural revolution of 1966-76, saw the dissipation of many of the educational and economic gains achieved in the earlier period of the revolution. There was widespread dislocation of production and distribution of the necessities of life, resulting in famines and starvation. Economic deprivations were indeed acutely felt and conditions were thus ripe for the use of economic motivations for the socialist reconstruction of China as also for the promotion of literacy which had always been seen as the necessary instrument in the process of socialist reconstruction.

The ideological underpinning. The Chinese leaders on whom the mantle of power fell after Mao's death, started with an "ideological innovation." They explained that poverty under socialism was a contradiction and this contradiction had appeared because some of the measures of mature socialism had been introduced in China prematurely. Chinese socialism, they propounded, at that particular historical time, was in the initial stage of socialism; and to move to the next stage of socialism, it first had to use some of the capitalist strategies for production of wealth.

Concrete policy implications. In concrete policy terms this meant the introduction of the policy of four modernizations; and opening to the West to learn from the outsider to serve Chinese interests. While the state would still control the commanding heights of the economy, it will promote a "commodity economy" at the lower levels of the economic system. It will unbound the farmer and the worker from state control to enable them to use their entrepreneurial skills to produce more. Farmers would own small individual plots of land and would be able to sell their production surpluses in free markets. The workers in factories would find economic incentives introduced at work. Equalitarianism would be abandoned. There would be training before employment. Merit, not seniority, would be rewarded.

Institution building and structural interfaces. Policy statements were more than pious hopes and were indeed honestly reflected in the lives of peoples and institutions. A complete system of adult education was established and institutionalized. Rules of the game in economic institutions were changed. There was a working interface between and among various structures -- economic, political, and educational. What this means is that economic motivations work since these are reinforced by the total system.

Economic motivations for literacy. The economic motivations for development in China are actualized through economic motivations for literacy. The argument goes like this: The modernization sought in large state enterprises as well as the higher productivity sought for in individual farms and side-line occupations have to be based on knowledge of science and technology. There are obvious limits to the popularization of science and technology in an oral culture. Therefore, farmers and workers must become literate if they have to be more productive. Indeed, all modern enterprises today, large or small, owned individually, by families or by the state are established, managed and run on the assumptions of a literate culture and on the assumptions of a workforce of farmers and labourers that can read and write.

A surface contradiction. Several analysts have pointed out that economic development in China is now creating educational underdevelopment. They explain that as economic success has become possible through personal initiative and hard work, families, as economic units, have withdrawn children -- and particularly girls -- from schools. Adult men and women themselves have stayed away from adult literacy classes and adult education work to be able to work on their side-line occupations and other economic enterprises.

This contradiction, it can be suggested, may be a surface contradiction, more apparent than real. The explanation lies perhaps in the fact that as the family has become a unit of economic capital, it also has become a unit of symbolic capital. As long as one, or some, in the family can manage well in literacy, others could do with rudimentary literacy at this particular phase of privately owned production enterprises. As brute force ceases to be the factor of production and as knowledge capital becomes more and more important, people will return to adult education to create new distributions of labor in literacy and new arrangements of levels of learning through adult education within families and communities. It is indeed significant that this reduction in adult literacy and adult education programs of some kinds has taken place only in rural areas and in the agricultural sector which so far is closest to pattern of subsistence. In urban areas, the adult literacy and adult education programs continue to explode.

The mythologic of being rich. The logic of economic motivations for literacy and the structures that reinforce the logic in the real sociological world have been further reinforced in China by a powerful mythologic -- the mythologic of being rich! The poor have always and everywhere drempt of becoming rich. Under Mao, a rich man was the capitalist's tail that had to be cut. Now the current leadership has once again made it glorious to be rich. To be rich is heroic. The old old New Year's Greeting of China, "May You Become Rich!" is back.

While China now has its importers and exporters and rock stars and actors who are millionaires; and while it has now some

farmers who are lakhpatis, being rich in China does not mean being "filthy rich." It simply means the opposite of poor, being rid of poverty, and above want and deprivation, that is, being well-off.

ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS FOR INDIA

Elsewhere (4), we have discussed at length the general possibilities of adult literacy promotion for development in India. What are the possibilities particularly of using "economic motivations" for literacy in India?

The ideological context. At the ideological level, the conditions are perfect for transfer of the Chinese experience. The mythologic of becoming rich has a great hold on the Indian people. Hindu India, on New Years' Day, worships both Lakshmi (the Goddess of Wealth) and Saraswati (the Goddess of Knowledge). The Muslims, the Christians, the Jews, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Jains and the Parsis, all pray for and pursue material prosperity. The "stated" political agenda, often cynically thwarted in actual practice, is egalitarian. There are promises of alleviation of poverty, and improving the standards of living of the people.

The socio-economic conditions. The socio-economic conditions are ripe for the use of economic motivations for development (and for literacy) in a country where half of the population hovers around the poverty line; where calorie intake per capita may be almost half as much as normally required; and where the population of youth seems to be losing in both weight and height because of malnutrition across generations.

The development theory in use. The theory underpinning the policy statements is pro-literacy and pro-education. Higher productivity is central to development, human resource development is central to productivity, literacy and education are central to human resource development.

The possibilities of transfer of lessons from China. Here the similarities between China and India end. From a socialist state, that is China, we now move to a soft state, that is India. China is a socialist state, a dictatorship of the proletariat. China also has a national registration system so that population movements across communities and regions are not unplanned. As a result planning for educational development and economic development can be carried out in a framework of greater relative certainty. In India, ideologies have a hollow ring, political commitments from the governing elite are week, and state structures remain unresponsive and unjust. On the other hand, there seem to be no serious pressures for building change in the society since the intelligentsia is unconcerned, the common people are depoliticised and are merely fighting to protect the little that they may already have. It is unlikely that economic motivations for literacy and development in India will be given a serious chance, though, those could work if honestly tried.

WHAT SHOULD THEN BE DONE?

In the light of the preceding, what do we, you and I, do in India? First and foremost, we need to act both as literacy workers and as citizen activists. We need to show personal commitment to development and to the role of literacy in development; and we have to demand similar commitments from our elected representatives.

Conceptual clarity about literacy motivations. In the meantime, we can not and we should not dismiss literacy work because adults are not motivated. If adults are not motivated we have to persist in teaching motivations for literacy. These may be merely economic motivations in the beginning, but must be generalized at appropriate times to include political, social, aesthetic and cultural motivations -- to include literacy for group solidarity, literacy for joining the political process, literacy to be able to help children in their school work, literacy for ethnic pride, literacy for consumption of culture and aesthetic experiences, and literacy for spiritual solace.

Literacy as central to the development process. When, during the life of a project or a program, do we intervene with literacy will depend upon existential conditions. The particular life situations of individual participants (or potential participants) in a project, and the socio-economic and political setting of the project or program will determine when to intervene with literacy and what motivations to use for literacy promotion. In a framework of crisis of famine and disease, literacy may have to wait a little. But within the normal framework of policy, planning and programming, literacy should be central to the logic of the development program. We should not be misguided by false assertions about literacy being difficult to teach, about Third World cultures being oral cultures and about Third World communities not providing literate environments for uses of literacy by the new literates. All cultures have been, are, and will remain oral cultures. But at the same time, all cultures today are already literate cultures as well. What we need and want today are new symbioses between the oral cultures and the written cultures. Literacy is not difficult to teach, if we persist, first, in teaching motivations for literacy; and, then, in teaching reading and writing. There is no environment in the world today where the print has not reached. All institutions of our world today, sacred and secular, are based on the assumptions of literacy among people. I saw literate environments in the Kalahari desert in Botswana and on the Altiplano in Bolivia.

Both code and content need attention. Both the code and the content of literacy should be given due attention. The level of literacy skills taught should be such that the new literate is able to read the symbolic world around. The content of literacy should enable the new literates to acquire sufficient symbolic capital on which the new literate can

continue to build. But "rudimentary literacy" should not be considered a waste and, therefore, something not worth doing. Even rudimentary literacy explodes the walls of the paper prison in which the illiterate is caught and dissipates for him or her the dark night painted in the printer's ink. We also need to realize that as soon as one phase of our literacy work will end, another will begin. New literacy work will need to be done because there will be new people and new learning needs as expectations for symbolic transformations and symbolic capital formation will continue to be revised and raised.

Let us then rededicate ourselves to our work for literacy whatever and wherever it is, and let us do our vey best within existing constraints. Possibilites are by no means small!

NOTES

1. H.S. Bhola, Social Mobilization and the Social Marketing of Adult Education. (Chapter VII, pp. 88-97). In: H.S. Bhola, World Trends and Issues in Adult Education. Geneva: Unesco International Bureau of Education & London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1988/89.

2. H.S. Bhola, "A Policy Analysis of Adult Literacy Promotion in the Third World: An Accounting of Promises Made and Promises Fulfilled," International Review of Education (The Hague), Vol. 30, No. 3, 1984, pp. 249-264.

3. This material is excerpted from a book by the author, entitled, Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Socialist Modernization of the People's Republic of China, in preparation. Part of the material for the book was collected in the course of a Unesco mission to China undertaken by the author during July 13 - August 5, 1990.

4. See H.S. Bhola, Adult Literacy for Development in India: An Analysis of Policy and Performance. In: Robert F. Arnove & Harvey J. Graff, eds. National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. New York: Plenum, 1987. Also, H.S. Bhola, A Policy Analysis of Adult Education in India: Across the Two National Policy Reviews of 1968 and 1986. (Paper presented to the Thirty-second Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, held in Atlanta, Georgia, 17-20 March 1988). Later published in Perspectives in Education, (Baroda, India), 1988.